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House of Representatives
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PHILADELPHIA DELEGATION, CO-VICE CHAIR

April 20, 2011

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: **Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up**
CC Docket No. 96-45; WC Docket 03-109; WC Docket 11-42

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

We write to commend the efforts of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service and Lifeline and Link Up and thank you for your leadership in addressing issues affecting the program at the March 3rd FCC meeting. In these trying economic times, these programs are extremely important to many of our constituents. We applaud your efforts to both increase participation in these programs and reform them to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse.

As we are sure you agree, the Lifeline program provides an invaluable service to low-income constituents in Philadelphia and across the country. We are glad the Board has decided to look for ways to minimize fraud, waste and abuse in the program so that deserving and qualified families will still have access to this important program.

Lifeline and Linkup are the central components of the low-income support programs in the Universal Service Fund (USF). The Lifeline Assistance program offers discounted monthly service rates for qualified families, and Linkup assists with initial installation of phone service in a home. Together, they ensure affordable telephone service for millions of low-income Americans. These programs are vital to low-income families' survival to stay connected to their families, potential employers and above all, emergencies.

Today, over 320,000 Pennsylvanians participate in this program. For many this service provides a means of contact for reports on school closings, storm warnings, street closings and government office hours just to name a few.

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Recently, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Lifeline and Link Up recommended that the FCC look for ways to adopt uniformity on areas such as verification procedures and sampling criteria that would apply to all Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (ETCs) in order to minimize waste, fraud and abuse. We completely support that goal, but this effort must be undertaken in a way that ensures that low-income Americans are not denied Lifeline service because of an arbitrary cap. The majority of the FCC's proposed reforms were both reasonable and ultimately beneficial to both the LifeLine program and its users. However, there were three proposed changes that could adversely impact users of Lifeline services.

The FCC proposed a "minimum charge", either a monthly fee or one time enrollment fee, to participate in wireless Lifeline programs. In addition, the FCC recommended the elimination of "self-certification" in the Lifeline program that would force enrollees to provide onerous proof of poverty. To both require that someone prove that they are poor ("low-income" in the parlance of the FCC) and ask them to pay a fee to receive services that their poverty qualifies them for, is perverse and unreasonable.

We also have great concern about the FCC's recommendation of capping support for the low-income portion of the Lifeline program. This would undermine what has made Lifeline more successful in the past three years than in the over twenty-year life of the program. Much of the rise in participation in the Lifeline program has been due to the ongoing economic downturn and the high unemployment that has accompanied it.

Again we are extremely supportive of the FCC's efforts to modernize the Lifeline program. There are some very strong proposals that were put forward which we believe will strengthen the program and help to eliminate waste, fraud and abuse. However, we feel strongly that the recommended usage fees and the elimination of "self-certification" procedures will cripple an important federal program at a time when it is needed the most.

Thank you for your leadership in addressing the issues with these critical programs. We look forward to observing the ongoing rulemaking process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony J. Payton, Jr.", written over a horizontal line.

State Representative Tony J. Payton, Jr.

Vanessa Lowery Brown

State Representative Vanessa Lowery Brown

Blondell Reynolds Brown

Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown

Kenyatta Johnson

State Representative Kenyatta Johnson

Kevin J. Boyle

State Representative Kevin Boyle